

The Soviet view of SALT

By Alexander Druzhinin

The top leaders of the Soviet Union and the United States are meeting in Vienna in order to approve and sign a new treaty on the limitation of strategic offensive arms.

We can state today that after seven years of difficult negotiations and considerable efforts to bring the positions of the sides closer a principled agreement has been reached on the majority of the provisions of the new treaty. It is now time to think what is to be done for its most effective implementation. The two leaders have not put their signatures on the treaty yet, but ever-new obstacles are already being erected in the way of its ratification by the US Senate.

The opponents of the treaty argue, for instance, that its text has many "defects" which the Soviet side allegedly can use so as to gain a unilateral military advantage. In so claiming, they keep silent about the obvious fact that the USSR has always honestly observed its international obligations, including those stemming from the provisions of the Soviet-American interim agreement on the limitation of strategic weapons, or SALT I for short.

What is more, the American critics of SALT II prefer to ignore the possibility that the USSR, for its part, can presume that attempts will be made by some people in the US to use the new treaty for gaining US military advantage over the Soviet Union. As a matter of fact, there are ample grounds to presume such a thing, including the intensive work which is under way in the US to develop new types of weapons which are not covered by SALT II. We also know that some of the enemies of the new treaty among Washington legislators are going to propose "amendments" which virtually would make it possible to circumvent its basic provisions.

We in the Soviet Union are a long way from

regarding SALT II as an ideal agreement: we are more inclined to call it a reasonable compromise. But is it unnecessary because it is imperfect? The Soviet public does not think so. Even the way it is, the treaty is a certain obstacle in the way of the race in strategic arms at least up to the year 1985. What is more, it will certainly exercise positive influence on the development of relationships between the USSR and the US and will give a new impetus to scientific and cultural exchanges and mutually advantageous trade.

As regards the allegation about "unilateral advantages" the treaty gives the Soviet side, it is being spread on purpose so as to try again to intimidate Americans with a "Soviet threat" and escalate the arms race in the US.

The essence of SALT II lies in the fact that it establishes equal ceilings of the sides' strategic arms. Consequently, it is based on the principle of their equal security. If SALT II is honestly observed and if it is believed in general that international agreements are not concluded in order to be violated, then the new treaty will not give unilateral advantages to either of the sides.

Mutual trust is a necessary condition for the success of any international agreement. This truth should be recalled in view of the fact that the sooner the signing of SALT II is, the more it is said among certain American political and military quarters that the US will be unable to verify its observance by the Soviet Union.

I can ask the following question in this context: can the USSR be sure that the US will not violate the treaty?

The Soviet people realize how complicated the problem of verification is. But the treaty is verifiable. This is confirmed by both Soviet and American experts. Furthermore, the So-

viet Union is striving to build its relations with other countries, including the United States, on the basis of trust, rather than mutual suspicion. That is why the problem of verification cannot be an obstacle in the way of signing SALT II. The problem of verification, as it is interpreted by certain legislators in Washington, is being artificially inflated so as to make the senatorial ratification of the new treaty more difficult.

The US opponents of SALT II also set forth other "arguments" against the treaty. They say, for instance, that its ratification should be linked with the entire complex of Soviet-American relations.

It is impossible to expect in real earnest that being a sovereign state, the Soviet Union will budge from its principles and begin conducting a policy which would suit certain American legislators. We are not imposing our principles on anyone, and will not permit anyone to bring pressure to bear upon ourselves.

I believe it is high time the American enemies of SALT II realized that the Soviet Union is no more interested in this treaty than the United States. Hence the attempts to hinder its ratification and "amend" it can eventually bring to naught the very essence of the understanding which has been reached with such difficulty and impair above all the national interests of the United States and the interests of international security and peace. A spontaneous and unrestrained escalation of the arms race and, as a consequence of this, the risk of growing confrontation are the sole alternatives to SALT II. This is publicly admitted by many realistically minded politicians in Washington, too.

This is a very strong argument indeed in favor of the treaty, which should be signed and honestly observed by both sides.

Alexander Druzhinin is a political observer for Novosti Press Agency, a Soviet organization.